

Report

Petrified Forest National Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

Petrified Forest National Park, located near Holbrook, Arizona, was established as a National Monument in 1906. It was redesignated as a National Park in 1962. It features one of the world's largest and most colorful concentrations of petrified wood. Also included in the Park's approximately 94,000 acres are the multi-hued badlands of the Painted Desert, archaeological sites, displays of 225 million-year-old fossils, and approximately 50,000 acres that are preserved as the Petrified Forest National Wilderness Area. Figure 1 shows a map of Petrified Forest National Park.

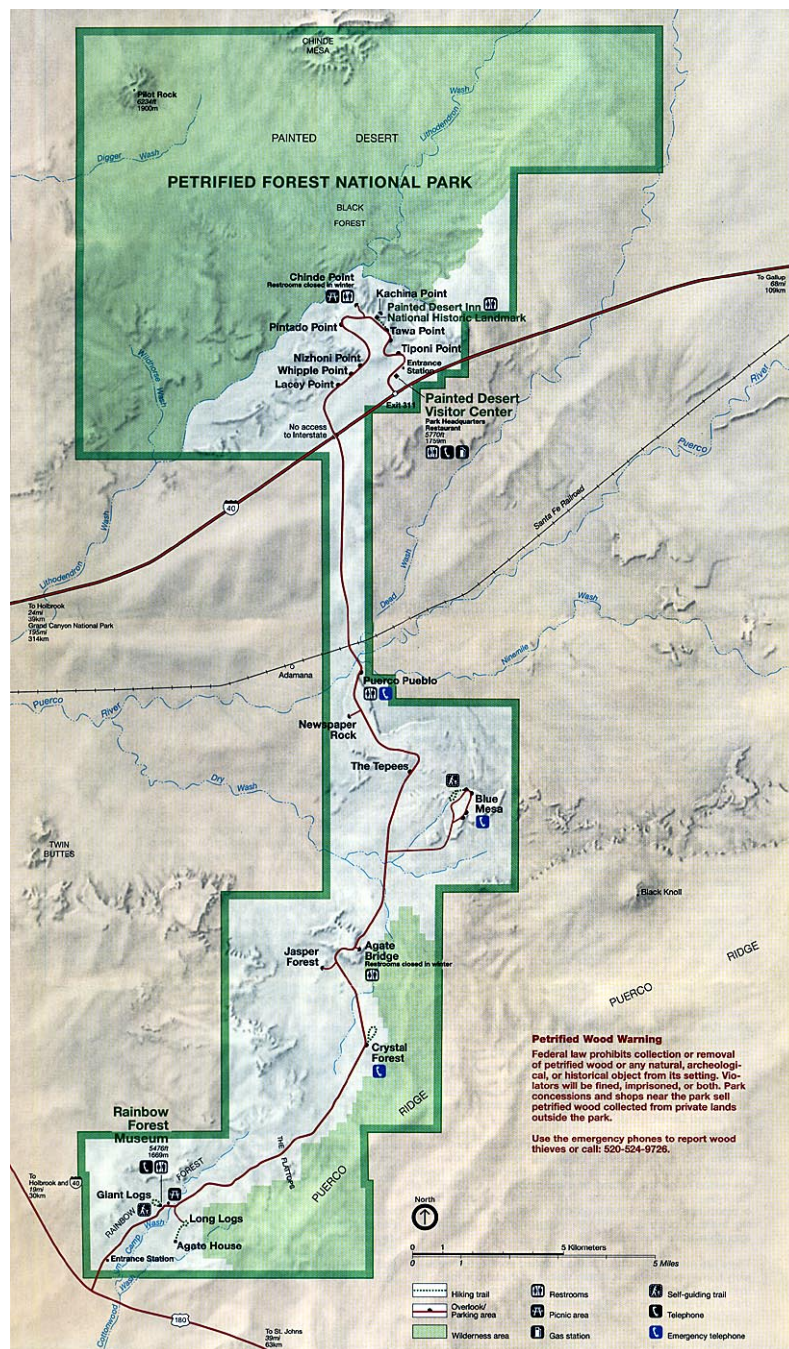
Petrified Forest National Park includes a north entrance, south entrance, and a 28-mile park road between the two entrances. The north end of the Park gets more visitation than the south end. The Park is open year round, except for Christmas and New Year's Day. Park hours are from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with longer hours during the summer. The north entrance is located off I-40 and includes the following:

- **The Painted Desert Visitor Center.** It provides information; shows a Park orientation film; and sells books, postcards, posters, maps, slides, and videos. A United States Post Office is located adjacent to the Visitor Center.
- **The Painted Desert Oasis.** This is located next to the Painted Desert Visitor Center, and has a gift store, a cafeteria, and a gas station/travel store.
- **Painted Desert Inn National Historic Landmark.** This is located two miles north of the north entrance. Historically, it has served as a trading post, inn, and restaurant. Today, it is a museum in the form of a pueblo structure with exhibits on cultural history and book sales. At various times, Native American artisans demonstrate crafts such as rug weaving and silver smithing.

The south entrance is located off U.S. 180 and includes the following:

- **Rainbow Forest Museum.** This has exhibits of early reptiles, dinosaurs, petrified wood, and a book sales area.
- **Rainbow Forest Store.** This has a gift shop and a snack bar/soda fountain.

Figure 1. Map of Petrified Forest National Park



Along the 28-mile park road are overlooks, entries to hiking trails, and a wilderness area trailhead.

Annual visitation for 1998 for Petrified Forest National Park was approximately 646,000 persons. Recently, visitation numbers have fluctuated between 650,000 and 700,000 persons. Peak visitation months are June through August. There is a strong shoulder season

in May, September, and October. Peak days include summer weekends, and sometimes Mondays and Tuesdays. The typical visitor stay is two to three hours. Many do not stop at the Visitor Center. The Park is not a destination park. Approximately two-thirds of all visitors enter at the north entrance.

The current General Management Plan does not discuss transportation issues. Long Logs Road, near the Rainbow Forest Museum, will be closed to motorized vehicles within a few years. This is to help prevent collection and removal of petrified wood by visitors. No recent transportation studies or recommendations have been made for Petrified Forest National Park.

Current transportation problems identified by Petrified Forest National Park staff include:

- Parking problems during peak hours of peak days.
- Size of parking spaces relative to vehicles. There are few spaces that accommodate large recreational vehicles (RV).
- Speeding along the park road. Speed limits are posted at 35-45 mph, but many vehicles are clocked at up to 65 mph.

One major resource conservation issue exists in Petrified Forest National Park. Some visitors collect or remove petrified wood and other natural, archaeological, or historic objects from the Park. These actions violate federal law.

Petrified Forest National Park and its gateway community, Holbrook, maintain a positive relationship. Holbrook's economy is heavily dependent on tourism. Also, there are relationships between the Park and the Navajo and Hopi reservations, and Flagstaff, Arizona, which promotes the Park.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

There are no existing alternative transit systems (ATS) at Petrified Forest National Park.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Potential ATS needs identified include:

- A mandatory shuttle system along the park road between the two entrance stations.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The potential ATS identified above would have the following benefits:

- A mandatory shuttle system along the park road would help alleviate congestion along this road and the need for additional parking. Also, it would control visitors getting in and out of vehicles, so it could help prevent the stealing of petrified wood and other resources.

The benefits of this potential ATS would need to be weighed against capital and maintenance costs of the system, resource issues involving the operation and maintenance of the ATS, and inconvenience to visitors. Currently, most visitors enter at either entrance station, drive along the park road to the other entrance station, and leave the Park. For example, most visitors driving westbound on I-40 enter at the north entrance station, drive southbound along the park road, and drive westbound on U.S. 180 to rejoin I-40 in Holbrook or stop there. Most eastbound visitors make the opposite move. A mandatory shuttle system would cause time delays to visitors, would discourage visitation, and would have a negative impact on the economy of Holbrook.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Petrified Forest National Park Official Map and Guide. National Park Service. 1998.

Petrified Forest National Park Digital Map. National Park Service Web Site. November 16, 1999.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Micki Hellickson, Superintendent, Petrified Forest National Park. Telephone conversation. November 15, 1999.

Micki Hellickson. Telephone conversation. November 17, 1999.